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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the authors explore rhetorical sensitivity and the behaviors that characterize the rhetorically sensitive person as defined by Hart and Burks in a paper entitled "Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction." Rhetorical sensitivity is viewed as an attitude toward encoding information obtained in social situations. After briefly summarizing the principles of rhetorical sensitivity, the authors detail the means employed to assess the features possessed by rhetorically sensitive individuals, the theoretical worth of the construct, and the directions for future research in the area. Recent research on rhetorical sensitivity is reviewed and some of the data is included in this paper. At the present time, the principles of rhetorical sensitivity are not viewed as behavioral guidelines useful for measuring interpersonal competence. (RB)

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RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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As we look back at the "era of expressivism," an era which bedazzled so many theorists and teachers of interpersonal communication in the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, we can already sense an anachronistic quality about it. Even now we are beginning to see the popularity of encounter groups, human potential meetings, and primal therapy being lessened, as the Devotees of Camp regroup themselves and turn toward "getting it" with est, Silva mind-control, and assertiveness training. Quite clearly, if one is to believe popular reports in the press, the bloom has left the nosegay of empathy-seeking and gently "getting in touch with one's self."

Despite the rapidity with which variations on the theme of expressivism are wrought, the contemporary student of interpersonal communication still appears to be confronted with two rather different philosophical perspectives by which to view his or her interpersonal affairs. Whatever local form it might take, the expressivist school (a complex amalgam in and of itself) argues that interpersonal contacts are maximized when the Self is actualized, when one's deepest and most important ideas and feelings fall upon a communicative environment, and when one finds an Other who is willing and able to respond empathically to the torrent of disclosures emanating from the Self. While this tripartite formulation of the expressivist's position is surely reductionistic, such a capsule summary appears to point up some of the dominant themes appearing in the literature relative to same.[1]

A much less popular (and less clearly articulated) set of presuppositions by which to guide communicative transactions might be termed the rhetorical school of interpersonal thought. Although the tenets of the rhetorical position have been known for centuries, only recently have

rhetorical perspectives been applied squarely to everyday interpersonal exchanges. One of the least tepid proclamations of the rhetorical position appears to be an article authored by Hart and Burks in 1972 under the title "Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction."[2] Essentially, this piece delineates certain foci about which the rhetorical position is centered. Contrasting their viewpoint to that of the expressivists, Hart and Burks contend that a rhetorical view of interpersonal communication "best promises to facilitate human understanding and to effect social cohesion." (H/B, P. 75) Supporting their claim, the authors describe the rhetorically sensitive person as an individual who willingly characterizes himself or herself as "an undulating, fluctuating entity, always unsure, always guessing, continually weighing [potential communicative decisions]". (H/B, P. 91)

In the present essay, we shall seek to better understand this rhetorically sensitive person of which Hart and Burks speak. After briefly summarizing the principles of rhetorical sensitivity, we shall detail certain means we have employed to assess (1) the features possessed by rhetorically sensitive individuals, (2) the theoretical worth of the construct, and (3) directions for future research in the area.

The Notion of Rhetorical Sensitivity

For the purposes of this paper, rhetorical sensitivity will be viewed as an attitude toward encoding. Thus, the principles of rhetorical sensitivity are not, as yet, behavioral guidelines useful for measuring one's interpersonal competence. Rather, rhetorical sensitivity is a way of viewing the world of human interaction, a mind-set which some of us apply to our

everyday communicative decisions. More specifically, there appear to be five constituent parts of the rhetorically sensitive attitude:

1. Acceptance of Personal Complexity -- An essential ingredient of the rhetorically sensitive attitude is the notion that each of us is composed of a complex network of selves, only some of which are given social visibility during an interpersonal transaction. Although we are role takers necessarily and although we are sometimes inconsistent as regards the personae we project interpersonally, "this does not mean that the rhetor must be all things to all people or that he willingly enters into all rhetorical situations that present themselves. It simply urges us to accept our complexity as a necessary and desirable part of the human condition and to realize that a given social contact will necessarily call forth only part of our entire rhetorical being." (H/B, P. 77) Thus, by acknowledging and accepting the mutability of Self, the rhetorically sensitive person is not unduly concerned with the compromises and inconsistencies which constitute the nightmares of the Real Self (of which the Expressivists speak).

2. Avoidance of Communicative Rigidity -- Although "the rhetorical position" has been interpreted differently by various scholars, surely the one feature which typifies a rhetorical vantage point is its call for interpersonal and inventional flexibility. The rhetorically sensitive individual is not afflicted by consistency-for-the-sake-of-consistency needs. Rather, he or she refuses to opt for the same role without regard to situation or context. Arbitrary social conventions, meaningless communicative rules and regulations, and rigid adherence to rhetorical norms are viewed as insipid by the rhetorically sensitive individual, one who feels that "every verbal exchange is a fleeting, ad hoc affair in which the guiding principle is flexible discretion, so buttressed by a concern for the complexity of the Other that no inviolable verbal premise should be brought to bear." (H/B, p. 82)

3. Interaction Consciousness -- Probably the most important aspect of the rhetorically sensitive attitude is interaction consciousness, an idea borrowed from the writings of Erving Goffman. The centrality of interaction consciousness to rhetorical sensitivity derives from the fact that Hart and Burks were at great pains to contrast the rhetorically sensitive attitude to both feckless machiavellianism (where one's own ideas and feelings are sacrificed so as to placate others) and unconscionable egoism (which prompts one to make messages without the least regard being given to the needs of the Other). The rhetorically sensitive person, therefore, is seen as constantly walking an interpersonal tightrope. As Hart and Burks write, "Interaction-consciousness, in the rhetorical sense at least, implies a concern for both the sovereignty of the speaker's position as well as for the constraints placed upon him by the intellectual and attitudinal make-up of the Other." (H/B, pp. 84-85)

4. Appreciation of the Communicability of Ideas -- Not all ideas and feelings, according to Hart and Burks, are grist for our interpersonal mills. The rhetorically sensitive person realizes that some social encounters demand that we say nothing at all (so great are the interpersonal and intrapersonal risks) and that "some ideas (no matter how phrased) are situationally bereft of rhetorical impact." (H/B, p. 85) The rhetorically sensitive person is thus willing to undergo the oftentimes painstaking processes of deciding which ideas and feelings are to be verbalized during an interpersonal exchange, realizing all the while that even some of our most prized feelings, should not, sometimes, be communicated, even though it might temporarily salve the psyche to do so. Such a proposition has a rather hard-nosed quality to it since it implies that "one's first thought, one's initial reaction, is suspect as an immediate vehicle for communication." "The 'decision to say,'" claim Hart and Burks, "is not one that can be lightly made in many instances." (H/B, p. 88)

5. Tolerance for Inventional Searching -- The attitudinal vector which has the most obvious import for sensitive human interaction is that which distinguishes between ideas and feelings and the ways in which those ideas and feelings can be communicated. The rhetorically sensitive person, argue the coiners of the phrase, realizes that "there are probably as many ways of making an idea clear as there are people." (H/B, p. 88) That there is often a great deal of hard intellectual work attendant to discovering just how our feelings should be made known cannot be gainsaid. Few of us, it would seem, relish the idea of working through the manifold communicative options presented to us after studied reflection. For many of us, the ongoingness of dynamic interpersonal exchanges seems to fly in the face of this call for judicious calculation prior to utterance. Still, because the rhetorically sensitive individual recognizes that form, as well as content, often determines how others will respond to us, he or she is willing to take the time and effort to choose carefully among rhetorical alternatives.

Rhetorical sensitivity, then, takes a rather distinctive stand vis-á-vis interpersonal encounters. Whatever some may see as its philosophical limitations, it is, at least, clear. Moreover, as a theoretical position, rhetorical sensitivity appears to have been helpful to scholars who have treated it as a philosophical springboard. Phillips and Metzger (1976), for example, have employed the construct when discussing the ways in which interpersonal friendships might best be established and maintained. Burks and Hart (1973) and Doolittle (1976) have found the concept to be especially

serviceable during moments of interpersonal conflict. Brockriede and Darnell (1976) have suggested that the rhetorically sensitive individual is best understood when contrasted to the Noble Self -- one who "sees any variation from his personal norms as hypocritical, as a denial of the integrity of Self, as a cardinal sin" (p. 9) -- and the Rhetorical Reflector, an individual (or archetype) who "has no Self he can call his own. For each person and for each situation he presents a new self." (p. 13) Finally, Hart, Friedrich, and Brooks (1975) have transported the concept of rhetorical sensitivity to the public communication situation, suggesting that effective interaction emerges from a natural blending of one's commitment to a message and one's commitment to some particular Other.[3]

Perhaps the most useful extrapolations of the principles of rhetorical sensitivity lie in the future. That is, because Hart and Burks originally set out to distinguish the attitudes of those persons who, they felt, maximized communicative possibilities, their conceptualization may eventually prove useful for discriminating between competent and incompetent communicators.

Presently, there appear to be five rather different strains of thought surrounding the idea of communicative competence. In a recent doctoral dissertation, John Wiemann (1975) has identified three such approaches to defininig the competent communicator:

1. The Human Relations School -- Popularized by Argyris (1962), this perspective views the competent communicator as one who can successfully manage both the task and socio-emotional requirements placed upon him or her by an ongoing group.

2. The Social Skills School -- Perhaps best epitomized by Argyle's (1969) work, this school of thought equates communicative competence with a knowledge of and ability to perform the rituals and routines associated with norm-bound transactions.

3. The Self-Presentation School -- Synonymous with the name of Erving Goffman (1959), this perspective views the competent communicator as one who can skillfully manage to present the "face requirements" demanded during a given interpersonal encounter.

In addition to these three vantage points, one can also envision two additional assumptive bases from which a delineation of the competent communicator might emerge:

4. The Sociolinguistic School -- Hymes (1970), among others, has implied that competence in communication derives largely from our ability to develop and to perform verbal acts which meet the social requirements of a given speech community.

5. The Gamesmanship School -- In part an outgrowth of exchange theory, modern proponents of this perspective (e.g. Rosenfield, Hayes, and Frentz, 1976) suggest that we are communicating optimally when we are able to (1) define the communicative game we are playing and (2) use the "rules of the game" for personal and interpersonal satisfaction.

Although the above characterizations are but partially suggestive of the five most popular behavioral approaches to communicative competence, our brief descriptions should be sufficient to indicate the theoretical role rhetorical sensitivity may eventually play in the area. Because rhetorical sensitivity has been conceptualized as a holistic attitude toward encoding, and because one's attitudes toward a given communicative encounter place constraints on one's interpersonal behavior, the development of a method for assessing rhetorical sensitivity would contribute in important ways to the study of communicative competence. If it is true that the importance of one's communicative behaviors is equalled in significance only by the attitudes with which those behaviors are enacted, it seems to follow that no purely behavioral designation of competence would alone suffice as a theoretical or pedagogical tool in the area. The remainder of this paper, then, reports our attempt to refine theoretically the construct of rhetorical sensitivity and to suggest its usefulness as a cognate measure of

communicative competence.

Assessing Rhetorical Sensitivity

Having been reminded of the theoretical postulates of rhetorical sensitivity and of the need to operationalize the construct in some pragmatic fashion, it became our task to develop a reliable and valid method for assessing the rhetorical attitude toward communication. In this section, we shall report our attempts to produce an instrument--which we have captioned the RHETSEN Scale--capable of discriminating between highly sensitive and highly non-sensitive individuals.

Initially, items for the RHETSEN scale were culled from the original theoretical essay by Hart and Burks. Working independently, both of the senior authors generated twelve items designed to tap each of the five aforementioned components of rhetorical sensitivity. This endeavor produced an initial pool of 120 items. Rather quickly, we realized that while the five dimensions of rhetorical sensitivity may have been theoretically discrete, they did not lend themselves to the sort of "operational autonomy" necessary for constructing the instrument via traditional sorting procedures. Because of these difficulties, we chose to maximize the "conceptual richness" of the scale in this, its developmental, stage.

By eliminating the several duplications found among the original 120 items, and by casting aside those items which played havoc with the English language, the initial pool of items was whittled to 75. These items were presented to a group of 262 students enrolled in the basic speech communication course at Ohio University during the Fall term of 1974. So as to minimize the disturbing influences of thematic repetition and test-taking fatigue,

two forms of the item pool were administered.

The responses made to this initial presentation of the instrument were submitted to item-analysis, whereupon items which did not (1) correlate at least .20 with total score and (2) differentiate at the .05 level of significance between the top and bottom 27% of the distribution of scores were eliminated. Thirty-seven RHETSEN-eligible items remained after this process of winnowing was completed.

Now that an homogeneous grouping of items had been identified, it was deemed important to retain in the instrument as much of the conceptual complexity of rhetorical sensitivity as possible. Accordingly, the remaining thirty-seven items were submitted to a principle components factor analysis and, after varimax rotation, items which did not load at a minimum of .40 on one of the factors (while loading at less than half of their maximum value on any one of the remaining factors) were expunged from the instrument. These procedures left us with a highly manageable, 22-item scale.

Manageability aside, five more items were subsequently dropped--two because they proved to be ambiguous even beyond the point of minor editorial repair and three because subsequent administrations of the scale proved them to be too "easy" (i.e. they were not differentiating adequately between sensitive and non-sensitive persons even though they correlated well with total score). The resulting 17 items were adjudged to constitute the RHETSEN Scale, a multifactored animal which, despite its complex maze of pieces and parts, appears to measure the construct of rhetorical sensitivity with some degree of dispatch and good sense. The completed scale is presented here as Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

For some, a problematic aspect of the RHETSEN scale will be the manner in which responses to it are scored. Quite apparently, we have chosen to present the respondent with a modified, Likert-type instrument but to score his or her reactions dichotomously. Naturally, the decision to employ such a psychometrically "heretical" method of scoring was a difficult one to make. Our experiences with more conventional scoring systems, however, left us with little alternative. Because this matter of scoring is crucial to one's interpretations of our results, we shall specify our reasoning on this matter in some detail.

Our choice of a scoring system was based upon the following premise: that the RHETSEN scale should measure the extent to which an individual fully embraced the notion of rhetorical sensitivity. We were not interested, per se, in (1) an individual's attitudes toward the component parts of the construct or (2) the intensity with which an individual responded to a particular item on the scale. Because we felt that rhetorical sensitivity takes a distinctive, yet subtle, stand on interpersonal encounters, we sought to insure that only those individuals who demonstrated consistent allegiance to the rhetorically sensitive attitude would be rewarded with a high score on the RHETSEN scale.

With these assumptions in mind, certain scoring options were obviously eliminated:

1. The Likert Option -- This option was rejected for two reasons. First, this method of scoring would have allowed an individual to achieve a moderately high score on the test even though that individual disagreed with the "keyed answers" on, say, half of the items. For example, if a given individual "strongly agreed" with the rhetorically sensitive attitude on half of the responses, but, "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with such an attitude on the remaining items, the resulting score would disguise the sharply ambivalent feelings he or she had about rhetorical

sensitivity. Too, the Likert option would have depicted such an individual as being unnaturally similar to those who marked the "neutral" response consistently. In other words, we felt that the Likert method of scoring would not clearly reveal to us those aspects of a person's communicative attitudes we wished to have revealed to us--i.e. his or her rudimentary affinity for the rhetorically sensitive position.

Also, the Likert Option necessarily allows for a "neutral" or "undecided" response. Oftentimes, we felt, a person's response bias would allow him or her to produce a moderate-range score by consistently adopting a "neutral" posture when, in actuality, he or she might be concealing a general lack of regard for the rhetorically sensitive position. Furthermore, it was felt that everyday, existential transactions with other people rarely allow us the luxury of communicating in a "neutral" fashion. Interpersonal situations, it seemed to us, often "force" us to make rather binary decisions.

2. The True/False Option -- Although we scored responses to the RHETSEN scale dichotomously, we chose not to present such alternatives to our respondents. Because many of the items on the scale probed highly debatable issues, and because many persons are suspicious of testing instruments which do not allow them to express the intensity of their reactions to individual items, we opted to present our respondents with an "illusion of choice" (even though we were interested exclusively in the "sidedness" of their respective stands).

By making the scoring choices we made, one's possible score on the RHETSEN instrument ranges from zero to seventeen, with 0 representing complete disagreement with the rhetorically sensitive position and 17 indicating complete acceptance of its tenets.

One of the most common objections to a scoring system like ours is that it disregards important information about a person's responses by not reckoning with the intensity of those responses. While this line of reasoning is compelling in many testing situations, we find it unpersuasive in our case for two reasons. First, and most important, we were uninterested in collecting such information. We were unconvinced, for example, that someone who "strongly agreed" with the rhetorically sensitive response on

all seventeen items was an existentially different communicator from one who merely "agreed" with the keyed responses consistently (i.e. we had no reason to believe that the appearance of equality among the [Likert] intervals reflected real-life, interval differences among communicators). Secondly, evidence gathered by Peabody clearly indicates that the "information" presumably contained in Likert responses are not different in kind from the information emanating from true-false questionnaires. When summarizing his extensive researches, Peabody (1962) asserted:

> The results show fairly clearly that composite scores on these Likert attitude items reflect primarily the direction of responses and only to a minor extent their extremeness. The practical conclusion suggested is that there is justification for scoring such items dichotomously according to the direction of response. The resulting score will closely reflect whatever the composite score would. . . . Hence the hope that Likert scale scores for example should be "influenced by the degree to which subjects favor or oppose attitude statements" . . . is largely unfulfilled in practice. (pp. 71-72, italics ours)

For reasons both theoretical and psychometrical, then, we opted for a hybrid scoring system.

Before turning to the tasks for which the RHETSEN scale was employed, the matter of reliability should be mentioned. Because of the multi-factored nature of our instrument, a test-retest method of assessing reliability was used. The scale was twice presented to forty-three undergraduate students enrolled in speech communication classes at Ohio University, the two administrations of the scale being separated by a two week interval. The correlation coefficient of .83 which resulted from these procedures indicated that the RHETSEN instrument measured something with a high degree of consistency. In the following section of this paper, we shall delineate the theoretical rarefractions of that "something."

Aspects of the Rhetorically Sensitive Person

The burden we shall be taking upon ourselves here is that of reporting certain speculative propositions about the rhetorically sensitive individual. Although the propositions to be offered should be considered tentative by the reader, the facts that they are based in large measure upon verifiable data and that they conform to common sensical expectations depicts them as something more than theoretical waifs.

Having developed a scale for measuring -- at face value -- the rhetorically sensitive attitude, and having determined that it could measure reliably that which it purported to measure, it then became our duty to (1) obtain normative data relative to the instrument and (2) estimate the validity of the RHETSEN scale. In performing such operations, our primary purpose was that of enriching the theoretical underpinnings of rhetorical sensitivity.

To date, more than two thousand Subjects have responded to the RHETSEN scale. In selecting our sample of respondents, we were guided by the usual methodological criteria as well as by the ravages of expediency. Eight hundred and thirty-two undergraduate students from sixteen different institutions of higher education were asked to complete the scale and to provide for us relevant demographic data.[4] Because we wished to minimize gross socio-cultural differences among our respondents in this initial study, all of our respondent-students attended school in one of ten midwestern states. For unabashedly practical reasons, each of our respondents was enrolled in an undergraduate speech communication course at the time he or she completed the instrument (i.e. during the spring semester of 1975).

Our Master Sample, then, consisted exclusively of midwestern college students, a factor which the reader must bear in mind when examining the normative data to be presented subsequently in this paper. Yet, despite the apparent similitude of the respondents, there appeared to be a good deal of heterogeneity amidst the homogeneity. For example, 31% of the respondents indicated that they resided in urban environments, while 45% of the sample were suburban dwellers and 22% reported that they lived in rural communities. Half of the respondents reported having had B-or-better academic averages, while half fell below that mark. The respondents ranged in age from 18-and-under to over 25 years of age, with the majority being in the 19-22 age range. Because many of the student-respondents were enrolled in required undergraduate speech communication courses when we administered the instrument, roughly sixty percent of our sample was composed of freshmen and sophomores. Also, although 38% of our respondents indicated that they were majoring in the Arts and Humanities, the remaining students were equally distributed among the social, physical, and administrative sciences. Finally, the diversity we sought in our Master Sample was achieved in large measure from the students' insitutional affiliations. Our respondents attend (1) private schools of both a denominational (e.g. Dakota Wesleyan, Grace College, Hamline University) and a non-denominational sort (e.g. General Motors Institute, DePauw University, Drake University) as well as (2) public institutions of both a cosmopolitan (e.g. University of Wisconsin--Madison, Ohio State University, and Wayne State University) and a non-cosmopolitan variety (.e.g. Moorhead State, University of Wisconsin--Parkside). In short, we feel that a maximum of diversity was achieved via our sampling techniques, despite the ostensibly similar cultural, economic, and sociological profiles

of our respondents.

In addition to the over eight-hundred respondents constituting our Master Sample, more than one thousand students from Purdue University and Ohio University responded to the RHETSEN scale during the developmental and validation portions of the study. From the wealth of data gathered, and after eighteen months of collecting information, we now are able to suggest the following thoughts about the rhetorically sensitive individual:

Rhetorical sensitivity appears to be distributed normally across the population sampled, although the rhetorically sensitive person may eventually prove to possess certain unique attitudinal and demographic traits.

At least as measured by the initial version of the RHETSEN scale, our eight hundred and thirty-two respondents distributed themselves rather normally as regards the rhetorically sensitive attitude toward communication. The mean score on the RHETSEN scale for our Master Sample was 11.91 (s.d. = 2.09), indicating that, on the average, the respondents "missed" five of the items. Obviously, such a mean indicates that some amount of 'numerical inflation" occurred, a condition which unquestionably resulted from the low difficulty indexes found for some of the items (but equally a condition for which corrections can be made in future editions of the scale). Despite all of this, however, Table 2 indicates that a satisfactory distribution of scores was achieved.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Upon careful scrutiny (using comparison-of-means tests), we found that no significant differences in rhetorical sensitivity scores could be attributed to (1) the sex of the respondents, (2) the chronological age of the Subjects, (3) the "academic age" of the students sampled, (4) the academic area within which the students were majoring, or (5) the students' grade point averages. Whatever else it may be, rhetorical sensitivity does not appear to be the exclusive property of the dull sophomore coed majoring in Horticulture.

Naturally, our Master Sample was not broad enough (particularly as regards range of chronological age or "occupation") to permit us to extrapolate from these data to society at large. We did, after all, sample the infamous college sophomore exclusively. There may be differences in rhetorical sensitivity attributable solely to demographic features of the individual. Still, while future research in the area may indicate otherwise, common sense suggests that anything as fundamental and complex as one's attitudes toward making messages in an interpersonal environment will probably not be revealed to be the exclusive products of any simple set of attitudinal or demographic traits. More than likely, the essence of the rhetorically sensitive individual will be revealed only after a matrix of educational, social, and cultural forces are considered and "regressed upon" one's scores on the RHETSEN scale.

Presently, we have some reason to believe that just such a complex of socio-cultural forces act upon us as individual communicators, earmarking some of us as highly rhetorically sensitive and some of us as rather non-sensitive. That is, when presenting the RHETSEN scale to the students who constituted our Master Sample, we included a shamefully simple grouping of questions which probed their (1) general political orientations, (2)

preferences for organized religion, and (3) hometown residences (urban, suburban, and rural). The "political" and "religious" probes were each single-item, five-point, Likert-type scale (e.g. 1 = I am highly liberal politically and 5 = I am highly conservative politically; 1 = Organized religion is extremely important to me and 5 = Organized religion is quite unimportant to me). As single item attitudinal scales, these measures are subject to a host of methodological problems, not the least of which is their questionable reliability. Nevertheless, we asked the questions.

Although extremely tentative, the results of this portion of the study tease the imagination. T-tests run between those Subjects designated as highly sensitive (those scoring >1 S.D. above the mean, N=188) and those rated as highly non-sensitive (those scoring <1 S.D. below the mean, N=189) revealed that the high RHETSEN scorers viewed themselves as being significantly more conservative politically than those who were designated as highly non-sensitive ($t=2.72$, $p<.01$). In addition, the highly sensitive group of students averred that organized religion was more important to them than it was to students who were classified as highly non-sensitive ($t=1.66$, $p<.05$).

Especially important here is the fact that these findings make first-rate theoretical sense. When one remembers that Hart and Burks were setting forth a rather cautious attitude toward interpersonal communication in their original article, the fact that mildly conservative students scored higher on the RHETSEN scale than did mildly liberal respondents make eminently good sense. Too, it is probably not serendipitous that the "expressive" school of interpersonal communication found its greatest favor among highly liberal and well-politicized academics. It is a somewhat conservative posture to hold off on one's first communicative impulse, to avoid speaking one's

piece on occasion, to choke off the desultory epithet, or to substitute circumspection for passionate reactivity.

Our findings here take on a less artifactual cast when they are incorporated into two other sets of findings. A three group, one-way analysis of variance was run among the RHETSEN scores of students who resided in urban (N = 254), suburban (N = 395), and rural areas (N = 176). Our results again conformed to the patterns hinted at previously ($F = 3.30$, $p < .04$). A Newman-Keuls test revealed that students residing in urban areas scored significantly lower on our instrument than did students living in suburban and rural environs. Ostensibly, the "dynamic density" which numerous observors have found to be characteristic of urban life fails to foster the sort of rhetorical attitude toward communication being tapped by the RHETSEN scale. Anecdotal observations of this very sort have been made time and time again. Adaptation to others, careful feedforward processing, and judicious reflection prior to utterance appear to be features which have never been especially characteristic of the urban communicative environment. However, even if findings such as those reported here are verified in future research, it would be specious to interpret them with smug provincialism. There is every reason to suspect that rhetorical sensitivity has very little survival value for persons inhabiting many urban communities.

One final piece of our conservative/sensitive puzzle can now be added. In order to determine the extent to which the above-mentioned findings were biased by our methodological shortcomings, an attempt was made to perform a partial "environmental analysis" on the data gathered. Because some rather gross sociological assumptions were made when performing the following analyses, the reader is urged to interpret our findings with caution.

Our assumptions were these: (1) public, urban universities would be likely to create environments within which rhetorically sensitive attitudes toward communication would not be fostered; (2) public, urban universities are likely to be more attractive to students of a liberal (political and religious) persuasion than would private, religiously-affiliated institutions which mainly attract non-urban students; (3) private, religiously-affiliated colleges would be likely to create interpersonal environments within which rhetorically sensitive attitudes toward communication would be rewarded.

With these assumptions in mind, and with a very real sense of sociological temerity, we proceeded to compare the RHETSEN scores of students attending Grace College (of Indiana), Central Methodist College (of Missouri), Hamline University (of Minnesota), and Dakota Wesleyan University to those respondents who were, at the time of the test's administration, matriculating at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee, the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and Wayne State University. Our prediction, of course, was that the 213 students sampled from the former (Private) schools would score higher on our instrument than would those attending the latter grouping of urban (Public) universities (N = 199).

Both our sociological and our rhetorical assumptions were confirmed. Students attending the Private schools were revealed to be significantly more politically conservative ($t = 4.54$, $p < .001$), more enamored of organized religion ($t = 3.97$, $p < .001$), and more likely to be from non-urban home towns ($t = 10.10$, $p < .001$) than were their Public counterparts. So much for the obvious. Less easily predictable was our discovery that the students in the Private schools scored significantly higher on the RHETSEN scale ($t = 3.12$, $p < .001$) than did our sampling of undergraduates made at the Public institutions.

If the findings reported here are to be believed (and only future research can remove their still-artifactual gleanings), our portrait of the highly rhetorically sensitive individual has taken on some life. Rather than being content with the abstract entity described by Hart and Burks, we now have some reason to believe that there is a flesh and blood quality to the rhetorically sensitive animal. Although he cannot be discovered by our simply noting his grade point average, or "academic occupation", or chronological age, he may indeed possess certain attitudinal preferences and living patterns which distinguish him from the non-sensitive prototype. We have also discovered that he has an equally good chance of being a she. And we seem to have uncovered the fact that the highly rhetorically sensitive individual is in no greater supply in society than is any other person or entity residing within the upper limits of an apparently normal curve. Yet, while we have breathed some life into our characterization of the rhetorically sensitive individual, the questions remain: Is the rhetorically sensitive individual really a person? That is, are there human behaviors associated with the rhetorically sensitive attitude toward communication, behaviors which are observable by others, and behaviors which make a difference to such observors? We seem to be able to answer such questions in the affirmative.

The rhetorically sensitive individual appears to exhibit behaviors which bespeak his or her attitude toward encoding. Many of the findings reported previously may seem chimerical. After all, thus far we have described the rhetorically sensitive individual as one who pencils his or her piece of paper in a certain way. Thus far, we have not met the cynic's objection to any research of this sort--that such measures are devoid of existential or

real-life implications. Thus far, we have not gotten beyond the face alidity of the RHETSEN scale.

When seeking to establish the predictive validity of the instrument, we utilized three separate procedures. In the first instance, the RHETSEN scale was administered to fifty-six undergraduate students enrolled in three sections of the basic speech communication course at Purdue University during the Fall semester of 1974. Concurrently, the three instructors (each of whom was familiar with the principles of rhetorical sensitivity) were asked to rate the rhetorical sensitivity manifested by each of their students. The following instructions were provided the instructors involved in this portion of the study:

> Utilizing the scoring system provided below, you are asked to rate the rhetorical sensitivity your students have evidenced during their interactions with their classmates. In doing so, you are urged to consider the overall communicative characteristics of your students; you are urged not to evaluate your students on the basis of any one set of interactions you may have observed. When rating each student, please use the following scale, being careful to assign only one rating to each student:
>
> (1) This student tends to have few positions of his or her own and generally mirrors the opinions of those around him or her OR This student regards adaptations to others as signs of weakness and maintains the integrity of his or her viewpoints regardless of the circumstances.
>
> (2) This student tends to adapt his or her positions to those with whom he or she is conversing. He or she appears to have firm beliefs, but is able to communicate those beliefs in ways that are palatable to others.

In constructing the scale in this manner, we attempted to operationalize the conceptual extension of rhetorical sensitivity offered by Brockriede and Darnell (who view the Noble Self and the Rhetorical Reflector as antithetical to the Rhetorically Sensitive Person).

After collecting the instructors' ratings, we found that twenty-nine students had been classified as sensitive and twenty-seven students described as non-sensitive. We compared the mean RHETSEN scores of the two groups and the results indicated that the individuals who were designated as sensitive scored significantly higher than those who were not designated thusly ($t = 1.82$, $p < .04$).

Although these results were those anticipated, we felt vaguely uncomfortable with them. After all, even though the instructor-raters had watched their students interact for nearly three months, and even though the instructors were ignorant of their students' scores on the RHETSEN test, our findings could not deny the fact that the instructor-raters were sympathetic to the aims of the study and may, therefore, have "forced" certain conclusions rather than having had them forced upon them by the observed behaviors themselves. Too, it seemed that "naive" observors (persons unfamiliar with the notion of rhetorical sensitivity) might not be able to make the same sorts of discriminations made by our "expert" analysts.

To resolve our misgivings, an in-tact group of sorority women ($N = 36$) at Purdue University was enlisted in the project. The criteria employed when selecting the group of women used were: (1) they had had intimate contact with one another for at least two years; (2) they were willing to participate en masse; and (3) their mean academic average was extremely high. We were, therefore, dealing with a bright and nominally cohesive group of subjects.

After having filled out the RHETSEN scale, each woman was asked to respond to the following questions:

A. Of the women completing the questionnaire this evening, the following three persons are, in my opinion, those most likely

to change their communication patterns in order to please others: (1) _____; (2) _____; (3) _____.

B. Of the women completing the questionnaire this evening, the following three persons are, in my opinion, those least likely to change their communication patterns in order to accommodate the view of others: (1) _____; (2) _____; (3) _____.

Implicitly, of course, question A was designed to elicit the names of those persons perceived to be "Rhetorical Reflectors" by the sorority women while question B sought out the "Noble Selves" in the group.

Again following Brockriede and Darnell's assumptions, we reasoned that the Subjects' RHETSEN scores should be negatively correlated with the number of times they were described as either a "Noble Self" or a "Rhetorical Reflector" by their sorority sisters. Our reasoning stood the test of Pearsonian statistics ($r = -.47$, $p < .002$). Now, it seemed to us, we had solid evidence that some set of behaviors was associated with the rhetorically sensitive attitude toward communication. Both our "expert" and "naive" raters had been able to perceive a certain something which correlated well with scores on the RHETSEN test. Exactly what that "certain (behavioral) something" was, unfortunately, is not apparent at this point in the research.

A final predictive validation technique was employed in this study when we sought out a group of persons who, conceivably, would necessarily demonstrate rhetorically sensitive attitudes in their day-to-day affairs. Were such an "anchoring group" to score highly on our scale, we felt that this would be further evidence of (1) the test's usefulness and (2) the theoretical value of the construct of rhetorical sensitivity. Thus, we isolated a group of persons who were professionally concerned with interpersonal communication.

The group finally selected for this portion of our validation consisted of persons who were majoring in pastoral counseling at Dallas Theological Seminary. Each of these men (N = 25) had had extensive training and experience in pastoral counseling procedures and practices. Additionally, each had indicated a desire to work exclusively in the area of counseling upon being graduated from Dallas Theological.

After administering the RHETSEN scale to this group of men, their scores were compared to those of twenty-one comparably aged graduate students from a wide variety of academic disciplines. Because we were afraid that the pastoral counselors might score well on the scale because of their ostensibly conservative viewpoints--and not because of their professional concern for sensitively communicating with others--we took pains to insure that our "comparison group" of graduate students was populated solely by persons who viewed themselves as being politically conservative and admiring of organized religion (by employing the Likert scales alluded to earlier). As expected, the pastoral counselors scored significantly higher on the RHETSEN scale ($t = 2.31$, $p < .01$) than did the comparison group of graduate students.

Our caricature of the rhetorically sensitive individual, therefore, seems to have moved apace. Such individuals appear to have certain traits which both naive and trained observors are able to discern rather well. Too, if future research bears out the findings reported herein, we might expect to find individuals in the "people professions" to be especially taken with the postulates of rhetorical sensitivity. Unfortunately, the vicissitudes of scale development and validation being what they are, no attempt has yet been made to ascertain exactly why the rhetorically sensitive person is seen as distinctive. However, some understanding of rhetorically

sensitive behaviors might derive from our better understanding the constellation of attitudes seemingly possessed by the rhetorically sensitive person. It is to just such matters that we shall now turn.

The rhetorically sensitive person appears to resist excessive self-centeredness as well as excessive other-centeredness. Despite its distinguished history in western scholarship, the "rhetorical viewpoint" has often been roundly misinterpreted (by popularists, and by scholars who should know better). All too often, the "rhetorical perspective" has been likened to either sly manipulativeness or rampant megolomania. That such characterizations possess no substantive historical, theoretical, or philosophical basis has not deterred some from leveling attacks at the rhetorical life-style. In contrast, the wisest delineations of the rhetorical position have argued that such a perspective is crucial whenever inter-personal relationships hang in the communicative balance.

Nevertheless, it quickly became clear to us when developing the RHETSEN scale that a renewed, data-based investigation would be necessary before the sensitivity of which we spoke could be appropriately termed rhetorical, and before detractors of the rhetorical viewpoint could be humbled. Accordingly, it became our task to (1) isolate standardized measures which tapped portions of the "theoretical space" shared (and not shared) by rhetorical sensitivity and (2) compare the scores of persons taking the RHETSEN scale with the responses they made to such comparative instruments. In short, we sought to establish the criterion validity of the RHETSEN scale.

Concern for Self

A central rhetorical tenet is that everyday human interactions require us (as communicators) to adjust our-selves to those with whom we are

interacting. Concomitantly, the rhetorically sensitive attitude recommends that we not be so concerned with Self that we fail to observe and to adjust to the vagaries of the Other. To test the viability of such theoretical postulates, we compared students' scores on the RHETSEN scale with their scores on the following measures:

1. Snyder's (1974) Self-monitoring Scale, which estimates a person's ability to guage accurately the impact that he or she is having in a situation involving interpersonal communication.

2. Hensley and Batty's (1974) Speech Anxiety Scale, which measures a person's relative discomfort during communicative interactions. As Phillips (1968) cogently observes, the speech anxious person is inordinately concerned with Self.

3. Holland and Baird's (1968) Interpersonal Competency Scale, which assesses the extent to which a person sees himself or herself as sociable, popular, persuasive, and energetic.

4. Ring and Wallston's (1968) "P" scale (of their Performance Styles Test) which isolates those who are restive and ill-at-ease when they cannot "be themselves."

5. Jourard's (1964) Self-Disclosure Questionnaire which estimates the extent to which a person feels free to talk about himself, his attitudes and opinions, his tastes and interests, etc.

6. Rokeach's (1960) Dogmatism Scale which measures mental rigidity, intolerance, and authortarianism.

Our predictions were that the rhetorically sensitive person would be an efficient self-monitor (since he or she is conscious of the interface between Self and Other), but would not be overly anxious about the communicative experience (since he or she is not excessively concerned about the role the Self plays during interaction). Furthermore, we felt that the rhetorically sensitive person would not be likely to embrace the "Noble Self" attitudes being measured by Ring and Wallston's "P" scale nor would he or she be tempted by the brand of "interpersonal competency" served up by Holland and Baird (who are, in effect, measuring personal

competency since their twenty-item scale contains not one item designed to assess the test-taker's attitudes toward other people!). Finally, we reasoned, the "consciousness of situationalism" which earmarks the rhetorically sensitive individual would prohibit him or her from having any consistently high needs in the areas of self-disclosure and dogmatism.

Our testing procedures were as follows: during the Winter term of 1975, fifty-six undergraduate students at Ohio University were administered the RHETSEN, Self-Disclosure, and Dogmatism scales. Although no significant correlations resulted (for Self-disclosure, $r = .11$, $p < .21$; for Dogmatism, $r = .15$, $p < .13$), we wanted to insure that the lack of correlation was not artifactual. Therefore, using the median split technique, "high" and "low" rhetorically sensitive individuals were designated (on the basis of their RHETSEN scores) and t-tests were run between the two group's Self-Disclosure and Dogmatism scores. As expected, no significant differences obtained (for Self-Disclosure, $t = .84$, $p < .41$ and for Dogmatism, $t = 1.19$, $p < .24$) between the "high" and "low" groups, suggesting that the rhetorically sensitive individual possesses no special need for making disclosures to others (such matters always being a function of situationally based decisions for him or her.) Also, the rhetorically sensitive person appears not to be characteristically dogmatic, although this is not to say that such an individual is incapable of maintaining firm positions on occasion.

Necessity forced us to administer the remainder of the comparison measures separately (and at various times) during the Spring, 1975 semester. In all cases, Subjects were Purdue University undergraduates enrolled in required speech communication courses. Results obtained from the one hundred and seven students who took both the RHETSEN test and the "P" scale of the

Performance Styles Test were not surprising--the test scores correlated negatively ($r = -.19$, $p < .03$), indicating that the rhetorically sensitive person is rather nonplussed by the rigid self-centeredness of Ring and Wallston's "P" archetype. Such a notion was corroborated by the fifty-three Purdue students who took both the RHETSEN scales and Holland and Baird's professedly self-centered Interpersonal (sic) Competency Scale. The results here ($r = -.31$, $p < .01$) strongly supported our conceptualization that the rhetorically sensitive individual is not one who could comfortably live an adaptation-free life style.

Nor, apparently, is the rhetorically sensitive person so preoccupied with Self that he or she is uncommonly anxious about interpersonal encounters. At least, the fifty-one Purdue undergraduates who took both the RHETSEN and Speech Anxiety scales revealed to us that interaction consciousness does not, perforce, mandate excessive concern for one's interpersonal behavior ($r = -.19$, $p < .09$). When this finding is coupled with our discovery that rhetorically sensitive individuals monitor their own interpersonal behavior with some degree of perception (RHETSEN: Self-Monitoring = .21, $p < .08$, $N = 49$) it appears that such persons recognize their interpersonal needs but recognize, too, that those needs must be met with tact and in the presence of specific Others.

Concern for Other

Having noted the rhetorically sensitive individual's apparent non-self-centeredness, we have not yet dealt with the other side of the coin: if the rhetorically sensitive person is not overly Self-conscious, does this imply that he or she is especially Other-conscious? From the data we have been able to gather, the answer seems to be a rather abrupt no.

To discover the attitudes of the rhetorically sensitive person toward his or her fellow interactants, we compared scores on the RHETSEN scale to those derived from the following measures:

(1) Cristie and Geis's (1970) Machiavellianism Scale, which assesses one's tendencies to placate others so as to receive interpersonal rewards.

(2) Crowne and Marlowe's (1964) Social Desirability Scale, the responses to which indicate the intensity of one's desire to be thought neat, kind, thorough, loyal, energetic, and courageous.

(3) Budner's (1962) Intolerance of Ambiguity Test which estimates the extent to which a person perceives ambiguous situations as sources of threat.

Our predictions here took advantage of the speculations originally offered by Hart and Burks: (1) that rhetorical sensitivity need not (indeed, should not) result in our adopting a chameleon-like posture when relating to others (thus, we expected to find significantly negative relationships between RHETSEN scores and Machiavellian scores); (2) that the rhetorically sensitive individual had no special or universal need to be thought a social paragon by others (thus, we anticipated that no significant relationship would be discerned between the Social Desirability results and those emanating from our administration of the RHETSEN scale); (3) that the rhetorically sensitive person would not be upset by ambiguous situations since, as Hart and Burks note, "While the individual himself is complex, an even higher order of complexity, and hence uncertainty, results when two or more communicators come together in an interpersonal transaction. In an interaction, the maze of selves which make us up are introduced to the unknown and intricate world of the Other...." (H/B, p. 79) Knowing this, we predicted that one's rhetorical sensitivity in particular would be positively related to one's tolerance for ambiguity in general.

In each case, our predictions were borne out. Correlations run between RHETSEN and Machiavellianism scores revealed that a negative relationship was perceived between those two indicies by the fifty-six Ohio University students who took both tests ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$). These same students also revealed that rhetorical sensitivity and Social Desirability bore no significant relationship to one other ($r = .10$, $p < .22$), a finding which also helps to document the "non-obviousness" of the RHETSEN instrument. Finally, although the negative correlation found between the RHETSEN and Intolerance of Ambiguity scores was not quite as strong as predicted ($r = -.23$, $p < .06$), the ninety-five Purdue students who completed both forms generally behaved as expected.

Our matrix of findings is thus complete. We have observed that those persons who score highly on the RHETSEN instrument are neither exceptionally self-centered nor are they overly desirous of inveigling others, even though they appear to be well aware of the roles played by the Self and the Other during an interpersonal transaction. The conclusion we derive from these data is that rhetorically sensitive individuals are interaction conscious and are willing to adjust sensitively to the highly situational demands placed upon them during their encounters with other people.

Implications of Rhetorical Sensitivity

Both in design and in execution, this study has been rather ambitious. Hopefully, we have added to the theoretical substructure of rhetorical sensitivity, confirming in many cases the conceptualizations first set out by Hart and Burks. The "conservative tone" of rhetorical sensitivity, its independence of simplistic causal roots, its manifestations in everyday communicative behavior, as well as its conceptual spirit--i.e. interaction

consciousness--have all been lent some empirical support in this study. Naturally, these initial probes in the area cannot, in and of themselves, document with finality either the substance or the utility of the construct. Much more research is needed before the heuristic worth of rhetorical sensitivity can be established and before the RHETSEN instrument itself can be regarded favorably. Still, our foray does suggest a plethora of questions which might be posed by the enterprising researcher.

The Question of Competency--One of the most exciting possibilities for research stems from the field's burgeoning interest in communicative competence. If the validity and reliability of the RHETSEN scale are continuingly affirmed, and if necessary refinements in the scale are made, the discipline of speech communication would have something that it has rarely had in the past--a useful measuring instrument whose conceptual roots grow out of its own, historically sanctioned, theoretical concerns. Although psychological tests and sociological protocols often bear fruit for the competence-minded researcher, all too often such tests--and their attendant theoretical stances--are transported unwisely into the arena of speech communication concerns. The RHETSEN scale, on the other hand, can trace its roots directly to a unique and important theoretical heritage, one which squarely focuses on spoken transactions.

This is not to say, of course, that speech communication researchers should be about the business of tilting mindlessly at provincial, disciplinary windmills. It is to say, however, (1) that the attitudes which people bring to their communicative exchanges must be understood, (2) that these attitudes toward encoding are every bit as important as the behaviors enacted during such exchanges, and (3) that some attitudes toward communication are better able to insure effective human interaction than

are others. As Johnson (1975) has perceptively argued, no set of communicative behaviors can be understood satisfactorily until the observor has reckoned with the attitude-set (or, as Johnson would have it, the "implicit communication theory") underlying such behaviors. In short, it is essential to ask: To what extent, if at all, is the rhetorically sensitive attitude toward interaction a necessary feature of competent communication?

The Behavioral Question--Although this study has made its strides, the exact behavioral correlates of rhetorical sensitivity are, as yet, unknown to us. By employing systematic observations of RHETSEN-designated sensitive and non-sensitive communicators, however, researchers could determine how, if at all, the rhetorically sensitive attitude is manifested in day-to-day interactions. If the results of such investigations coincide with the "behavioral hints" contained in this essay, the construct of rhetorical sensitivity would be greatly enriched.

The Developmental Question--An especially intriguing set of questions centers on the "ascertainment" of the rhetorically sensitive attitude. When does such an attitude toward communication first become operational? Why do some children embrace the attitude during their formative years while others live their entire lives seemingly devoid of rnetorical sensitivity? To what extent does the process of maturation include differential learning of the rhetorical facts of life? Is one's perceived "maturity" related to one's rhetorical viewpoint? Does the process of aging gradually desensitize some of us to rhetorical perspectives? Naturally, before any such questions can be answered meaingfully, a much greater range of normative data must be obtained for the RHETSEN scale.

The Pedagogical Question--Of fundamental importance is the matter of how rhetorical sensitivity is learned. Do we learn it didactically at our parents' knees or is it acquired in the knockabout world of everyday human interaction? Does speech communication training typically foster rhetorically sensitive attitudes? What sorts of teaching strategies best inculcate rhetorical attitudes toward communicative encounters? On a very different front, do Dale Carnegie's intellectual heirs supply us with more than our share of Rhetorical Reflectors? And what of encounter groups and sensitivity training? Do such experiences nourish non-rhetorical attitudes, or have Hart and Burks been too simplistic in constructing their expressive/instrumental dichotomy? Conceivably, answers to such questions could tell us much about the interplay between pedagogy and existential communicative behavior.

The Personality Question--Following the tack taken in this study, other researchers might well investigate the universe of attitudes possessed by the highly sensitive person. For example, by correlating scores on the RHETSEN scale with those derived from a large, multifaceted personality test (such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), a greater understanding of the rhetorically sensitive individual might emerge. Too, we might ask if rhetorical sensitivity is appropriated differentially by people because of certain personality traits they possess. Is it possible that one's relative needs for extroversion or authoritarianism or social dominance are related in some way to one's attitude toward encoding communications? While such questions are complex ones, their answers might well shed light on the ontogeny of rhetorical sensitivity.

The Environmental Question--As a counterpart of the "personality question," researchers might investigate the sorts of social atmospheres

which help to foster (or inhibit the acquiring of) rhetorical perspectives. Although we have cautiously suggested here that "institutional" or "cultural" environments may be related in some way to one's rhetorical sensitivity, our intimations amount to little more than educated guess work. A good deal of sophisticated research could be done, however, in precisely this area. Do certain kinds of familial settings encourage the adopting and maintaining of the rhetorically sensitive perspective? Is such an attitude systematically rewarded in some social groupings and punished severely in others? To what extent is the adolescent's peer group typically one which chokes off the tendency to deal with others rhetorically? Are there certain occupational environments from which the rhetorically sensitive person is routinely excluded or within which he or she functions optimally? For research of this sort to be conducted will demand that investigators acquire both the patience of Job and sophisticated research techniques, so complex are the questions.

The Demographic Question--Because the present study has been limited in its demographic perspective, much more still remains to be learned about the rhetorically sensitive individual. Is it true that the rhetorical mind-set is not the exclusive property of one sex, age, or educational level? What effects do ethnic background, geographical considerations, or sub-cultural factors have on rhetorical sensitivity? Is it possible that an internally consistent religious and/or political profile can be composed for the rhetorically sensitive individual? If, as seems likely, no simple set of demographic variables adequately accounts for the variance associated with scores on the RHETSEN scale, what sort of purely demographic matrix will adequately describe the rhetorically sensitive person to us? Answers to such questions would be fascinating indeed.

The Taxonomical Question--If the rhetorically sensitive individual is, in fact, a prototype, is it true that other individuals gain their distinctiveness from the attitudes they bring to communicative encounters? Is the world of human interaction really populated by "Noble Selves" and "Rhetorical Reflectors"? Another way of asking this question would be to inquire more deeply into the nature of rhetorically insensitive persons. Who are they and why are they non-plussed or repelled by the rhetorically sensitive attitude? An even more basic question would be: does it make any sense to conceive of such prototypes at all, or does such a procedure reify the world of human interaction unnecessarily? Whatever particular form the taxonomical question takes, however, future research must concern itself with carving out the theoretical space presumably occupied by rhetorical sensitivity.[5]

The Philosophical Question--Tied to the taxonomical question is a speculative one: what philosophical presuppositions (as opposed to psychological or sociological predispositions) are necessary if one is to embrace fully a rhetorically sensitive perspective? What sorts of assumptions does the rhetorically sensitive individual make about the world and how do these assumptions relate to his or her sensitivity? What must a person believe in general before he or she can embrace adaptation, interaction consciousness, and the complexity of self in particular? Moreover, are there certain ideological poles--whether social, political, or religious in origin--about which sensitive and non-sensitive individuals rally? That these questions are themselves primitive suggests how little we currently know about the various philosophical underpinnings of ordinary human interactants.

The Relational Question--Finally, a veritable bevy of relationship-oriented questions remain to be answered. With whom does the rhetorically sensitive individual strike up interpersonal relationships? Does such an individual's attitude toward communication facilitate or hinder the establishment of such bonds? What is the connection, if any, between interpersonal attraction and one's attitude toward encoding messages? Is it true, as Phillips and Metzger (1976) have suggested, that a rhetorical mind-set is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful establishment and maintainence of intimate relationships? Do rhetorically sensitive individuals have a "natural attraction" for one another or do rhetorical opposites attract? Is one's popularity in a work-related or social group associated with one's relative endorsement of the "rhetorical position"? In an era of the "instant relationship" and of sundry other social maladies, such queries are obviously not without their significance.

While all of these questions are important, and while every effort should be made to answer them, it cannot be forgotten that the rhetorically sensitive position may never be a popular one. Such a perspective demands a great deal from us as communicators--the ability to judge carefully, the willingness to be quiet occasionally, the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, and most important of all, a distaste for communicative bromides. Although Pace, Boren, and Peterson (1975) may flatly claim that "Interpersonal relationships tend to improve when both parties communicate what is happening in their private worlds through self-disclosure," (p. 27) most of us find out sooner or later exactly how partial and potentially vapid is their advice. In the long run, the ultimate value of rhetorical sensitivity may be its capacity to provide an alternative to the expressivism-run-wild of which

Thomas Cottle (1975) has spoken so movingly:

> It's peculiar, this psychological part of America's social revolution. It seemed to surface quietly enough, but gradually, amidst a great deal of hubbub about the importance of free expression, the release of the repressed, the necessity to be open to everyone and to every experience, came a new cry: let it all hang out! To have private thoughts, private emotions, was deemed as pathological as owning land, a cotton factory and company store while others went hungry, unclothed, unsheltered. Now at these professional meetings where everybody agreed on the evils of capitalism, they were speaking of the importance of spilling guts, baring souls, opening up fully to one another.
>
> New businesses developed from all of this, and a new professional cadre was born, seemingly overnight, to help the rest of us uptight folks become downright loose. They were telling us, this new cadre, that even if it meant taking lessons or traveling long distances to special resorts and expensive retreats, it was essential that we learn to get those inner feelings, the easy to tell secrets, then the hard to tell secrets, then the entire inner self. And when all this stuff had been exposed and we were just about psychologically everted, the reality of psychological private property would be obliterated and we would be free, or equal, or renewed, or something. (p. 19)

FOOTNOTES

[1]Although the expressivist position has been articulated in many ways by many persons, the interested reader is referred to the following volumes, should he or she wish to discover how that position has been interpreted recently by speech communication scholars: C. Rossiter and W. B. Pearce, Communicating Personally (New York: 1975) and J. Stewart and G. D'Angelo, Together: Communicating Interpersonally (Reading, Mass.: 1975).

[2]In this paper, all citations and quotations from Hart-Burks' article will be designated parenthetically and in the following manner: (H/B, p. 000).

[3]Helpful though the construct has been to some, other commentators have suggested that all is not right within the world of rhetorical sensitivity. Sillars (1974), for example, has taken rather pronounced exception to the expressive-rhetorical dichotomy erected by Hart and Burks. Ostensibly, Sillars sees a significant amount of overlap between rhetorical sensitivity and humanistic psychology (a marriage proposal which leaves these authors vaguely unsettled). In an otherwise interesting piece, Poulakos (1974) rather roundly misinterprets the idea of rhetorical sensitivity by likening it to Martin Buber's concept of "seeming" rather than to Poulakos' own understanding of the "between."

[4]This study could not have been completed without yeoman service being provided by numerous individuals. The authors would like to single out the following persons for special thanks: Professors John Baird, John Bittner, Timothy Choy, Richard Crable, Barbara Doolittle, Robert Doolittle, Donna Feld, Paul Friedman, Michael Hagan, Harriet Harral, Laurie Hayes, Gary Hunt, Corwin King, Charlotte Lewis, Duane Litfin, Stephen Lucas, James Measell, Alan Segrist, Michael Turchin, Robert Vogel, and Stephen Young,

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Table 1

Instructions, Items, Scoring Key, and Difficulty Index for the RHETSEN Scale [1]

	Item and Scoring Key[2]	Difficulty[3]
1.	People shouldn't always be frank and spontaneous in conversation.(A/B)	.29
2.	The first thing that comes to mind is the best thing to say.(C/D)	.19
3.	In social situations, I rarely "speak my piece." (C/D)	.27
4.	Usually, the facts speak for themselves.(C/D)	.46
5.	I tell it like it is, no matter what the consequences. (C/D)	.27
6.	It is best to hide one's true feelings in order to avoid hurting others.(C/D)	.45
7.	I often keep quiet rather than say something which will alienate others.(A/B)	.34
8.	It is important to me that I make an issue out of major disagreements I have with others.(C/D)	.17
9.	For me, a constructive relationship is possible with people I dislike.(A/B)	.47
10.	The only way to be honest is to say what you think. (C/D)	.61
11.	Some things just should not be said under almost any circumstance.(A/B)	.26
12.	When I'm sure I'm right, I press my point until I win an argument.(C/D)	.46
13.	When angry, I say nothing rather than say something I'll be sorry for later.(C/D)	.51
14.	Teenagers living at home should watch their language carefully in order to avoid angering their parents. (A/B)	.42
15.	I am not always consistent in the way I behave toward others.(A/B)	.23
16.	"Look before you leap" is the most important rule to follow when talking to others.(A/B)	.20
17.	I find it necessary to follow all of the social rules in conversation.(C/D)	.18

1 Instructions for the RHETSEN scale were: "Listed below are a number of statements to which we would like your reactions. Please respond to each statement individually and be assured that there are no absolutely right nor absolutely wrong answers. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by marking one of the following responses on the answer card: A = agree; B = unsure, but probably agree; C = unsure, but probably disagree; D = disagree."

2 Items keyed in the direction of the rhetorically sensitive response.

3 Proportion of individuals not responding in the RS-keyed direction. (Because the item — total correlations for some of the items are currently low, we are presently developing a new version of RHETSEN which will eliminate such difficulties.)

Table 2

Distribution of RHETSEN Scores for 832 College Students at Sixteen Institutions in the Midwest

Score*	N	Percent
3	1	.1
5	3	.4
6	3	.4
7	16	1.9
8	26	3.1
9	51	6.1
10	89	10.7
11	142	17.1
12	171	20.6
13	142	17.1
14	111	13.3
15	49	5.9
16	23	2.8
17	5	.6
TOTALS	832	100

* $\bar{X}$ = 11.907, s.d. = 2.0888